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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000188

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, DRL, INL, AND S/WCI, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN  
FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER, OPDAT FOR  
ACKER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [KCRM](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: VILLAGE LEADERS WILLING TO DISCUSS

COMPENSATION REGARDING 2001 BORDER AGREEMENT WITH MACEDONIA

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A March 7 visit by the USKFOR Polad to Debelde, a town affected by the 2001 border agreement between Macedonia and the then-FRY, suggests that village leaders there talk a tough game on not giving up their land, but are actually quite willing to discuss compensation. Indeed, these leaders' righteous indignation appear to be a means to inflate the value of the land in question. We and USKFOR believe that at the end of the day, if compensated, the villagers will part with their land, but they would prefer if the money comes through their own institutions, rather than via Macedonian authorities. In their eyes, if they can say they sold their land to the Kosovar government, they would avoid accusations of "selling out" to Macedonia and legitimizing the border agreement, which many here see as having been negotiated without regard to Kosovo's interests. We and USKFOR will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the situation remains peaceful and encourage the Kosovo government to be proactive in dealing with villagers' concerns. END SUMMARY.

We'll never give up our land...

12. (SBU) USKFOR Polad provided USOP with information on his March 7 visit to the Debelde, a border village with Macedonia affected by the 2001 border agreement between Macedonia and the then-FRY. Local leaders, including the village vice president and a member of the village council, offered him background, saying of the 2,500 hectares that now belong to Macedonia, 429 hectares (1,060 acres) are the private property of roughly 60-70 families from Debelde who can no longer make use of this land. Asked what the land was used for, these leaders said it was mainly pasture for livestock, but claimed that it could be used to build a hotel and ski resort and that a German company had offered to do so in 2004, but backed down when it learned the land was part of a contested agreement.

13. (SBU) USKFOR Polad heard a number of statements about the border situation, alternating between anger directed at UNMIK at not being able to use the land for the last seven

years, confusion as to whether PM Ceku supported the agreement or not, righteous refusal to ever part with their land, and, most tellingly, hardheaded calculation of how much compensation they would require. Regarding this last point, the leaders calculated the value at 3,000 euro/ari, putting the total value of the Debelde claim at nearly 129 million euro. (Note: An ari is 100 square meters. 100 ari is equal to one hectare. End Note.)

...Well, maybe if the Kosovar government buys it

¶4. (SBU) The village leaders concluded their comments to USKFOR Polad by saying they would abide by the 2001 agreement "if Ahtisaari says we have to," and only if compensated by the Kosovar government. One of the leaders added, "We do not want to be remembered as the village that sold Kosovo to the Macedonians." A local schoolteacher who later joined the conversation contributed his own radical opinion, which included the need for a "secret army" that would move the border even past Skopje. The schoolteacher even claimed that this "secret army" was already in existence. These comments brought hoots and derisive laughter from the village leaders, who chastised him for saying such silly things.

¶5. (SBU) On the way back to Camp Bondsteel, USKFOR Polad gave a ride to one of the participants, who owned three hectares of land in the area in question and who said that the land had not been worked in 20 years. He noted that many villagers from Debelde had emigrated in recent times and that he had not heard of any offers or prices set, but that if he were approached by agents of the Macedonian government to sell, he would refuse out of spite and indignation: "if it is going to be sold to anyone, it should be sold to the government of Kosovo."

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¶6. (C) COMMENT: It appears that village leaders in Debelde are attempting to use their righteous indignation over the 2001 border agreement to inflate the price of their land and then eventually sell. Having the Kosovar government purchase it, in their thinking, would both allow them to get a better price than what the Macedonians may be offering and help them avoid any accusations of selling out to foreigners. We and USKFOR will continue to closely monitor the situation to ensure it remains peaceful, and will urge the Kosovo government to be proactive in addressing villagers' concerns.  
END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW